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SUBJECT: THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT: DOWN BUT NOT OUT

11. (U) Summary: Malawi's formerly powerful ruling party, the United Democratic Front (UDF), has declined significantly in both resources and influence since President Mutharika's resignation from the party in February 2005 and his subsequent formation of a new ruling party.

Following the split, the UDF pushed unsuccessfully for Mutharika's impeachment, and is now focused on the next elections in 2009. The future of the party is tied to the political success or failure of Mutharika and his Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).

Background

12. (U) The UDF is the third largest party in Parliament, and the party of former president Bakili Muluzi, who remains its National Chairman. The party was formally registered in July 1993 after the referendum introducing political pluralism. The UDF was in power from 1994 to 2005; from 1994 to 2004 under President Muluzi and from May 2004 to February 2005 under President Mutharika. Its stronghold was Malawi's populous southern region. However, the party began to lose political ground when Muluzi campaigned for an end to presidential term limits and later for a third term in 2003. Public resentment of Muluzi's attempt to hold onto power caused the loss of many of his hand picked candidates in the 2004 parliamentary elections. In their place a record number of independent candidates with UDF ties but without the Muluzi blessing (or curse) were elected to Parliament. Many of these independents then joined the pose-Muluzi UDF, but quickly followed Mutharika to the new DPP in 12005. President Mutharika won the 2004 presidential election as the UDF's presidential candidate with a plurality vote of 35.9 percent. The party itself won 49 out of 193 seats in Parliament.

13. (U) After taking office, Mutharika came into conflict with much of the party, including his predecessor Muluzi. Muluzi held onto power in the party and attempted to use Mutharika to continue to govern behind the scenes. Mutharika accused Muluzi and other UDF leaders of blocking his anti-corruption campaign, and he resigned from the UDF in February 2005. He then formed the DPP, which under local practice automatically became the "governing" party in parliament, despite its initially miniscule, non-elected standing in the assembly.

14. (U) Since the split, the UDF's popular base has shrunk from the entire southern region to only the eastern part of the southern region. The east is mainly comprised of Muslims from the Yao ethnic group, as Muluzi himself is a Muslim Yao from this area. This shrinkage has largely benefited the president's DPP, and if the DPP begins to falter, the UDF may regain some of its southern strength.

The UDF today

15. (U) The UDF reacted to Mutharika's defection by aggressively pursuing impeachment of the President on a number of questionable grounds. The impeachment was backed by most of the opposition

Malawi Congress Party (MCP) whose leader, John Tembo, claims to have actually won the 2004 presidential election. However, the impeachment move failed, as most of the public turned against it, its procedures were challenged in court, and the opposition was unable to amass the necessary votes in Parliament.

¶6. (U) Bakili Muluzi formally put the impeachment issue to rest in early July 2006. Upon returning from six months of medical treatment in Britain, Muluzi declared that the UDF will not pursue impeachment of Mutharika. Instead he urged party members to prepare for the 2009 presidential and parliamentary elections.

The future of the UDF

¶7. (U) The future of the party is tied to the success or failure of President Mutharika and his DPP. Support for UDF plummeted when Mutharika left the party. A number of UDF leaders followed Mutharika into the DPP, the UDF came to be perceived as standing for corruption above all else, and a number of UDF leaders were in fact charged with corruption. A DPP victory in all six seats of a by-election in December 2005 was another heavy blow for the UDF, which lost three seats in its southern base. However, the DPP has faced a number of recent challenges and for the first time looks as if it could be vulnerable in 2009. The defection back to the UDF of the DPP's Regional Governor for the South means that the UDF still has a fighting chance in the entire region.

Comment: UDF as Spoilers

¶8. (U) The UDF should be able to challenge the DPP in the 2009 election, thanks to the charisma and political talents of former President Muluzi. Muluzi is very popular with the UDF base, and his

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departures and arrivals to the country are greeted and cheered by thousands of supporters. Muluzi's popularity in the UDF is probably part of the reason why Mutharika chose to leave the party, rather than try to take it over. However, the UDF is unlikely to retake power soon, as the reputation for corruption-- a hallmark of the ten years of UDF rule-- still clings tightly to the party. At the halfway mark between elections, admittedly very early to make predictions, it appears that the best the party is likely to achieve in the coming elections would be to prevent the DPP from gaining a majority of the seats in parliament. Key indicators in the coming months will be the expected by-elections to fill several seats vacated by death or jail sentences and the projected district assembly elections, expected in May or June 2007.

Key UDF Leaders

¶9. (SBU) Bakili Muluzi, UDF National Chairman -- The former President became UDF National Chairman just before the 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections. Having failed to amend the Malawi Constitution to remove term limits and allow for a third term, Muluzi took up the chairmanship of the party as a way of holding power behind the scenes. Due to a constitutional technicality (which outlaws more than two "consecutive terms"), he could be eligible to run for President again in 2009, if he chose to do so.

¶10. (SBU) Brown J. Mpinganjira, MP, UDF National Executive Committee Member -- A founding member of the party, Mpinganjira served as a cabinet minister in Muluzi's administrations between 1994 and 2000. He then broke with Muluzi over the open/third term issue and formed his own party, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). In the 2004 Malawi presidential election, Mpinganjira finished in fourth place in a field of five, receiving only 8.7% of the vote. Mpinganjira later dissolved the NDA and rejoined the United Democratic Front. Formerly Muluzi's right hand man, Mpinganjira is the strongest contender for the UDF Presidential nomination in 2009.

¶11. (SBU) Friday Jumbe, MP, the UDF's Deputy Leader in Parliament -- He was Muluzi's last Minister of Finance (2002 to 2004). In May 2005

he faced corruption charges including the misappropriation of \$4.2 million from the state-run agricultural company (ADMARC) where he had served as General Manager prior to becoming Finance Minister. He pled not guilty, and the case is yet to proceed. Jumbe is generally believed to have accumulated his wealth corruptly, and owns Superior Hotel in Blantyre, among other assets. It is this very wealth that makes him a contender for the UDF's 2009 Presidential nomination.

¶12. (SBU) Sam Mpasu, spokesman of the UDF -- former cabinet minister (under Muluzi), former Speaker of Parliament and former Secretary General of the UDF. He was first elected to Parliament in 1994 but lost his seat in the 2004 elections. While Mpasu is one of the contenders for the party's presidential nomination, the fact that he comes from the central region in a party dominated by southerners is a disadvantage for him.

¶13. (SBU) Humphrey Mvula -- Mvula is a trusted Muluzi aide who is rumored to have masterminded the alleged vote rigging in the May 2004 presidential election in favor of Mutharika. In August 2004 he was arrested and charged after a probe in to the dealings of the state-run bus company where he was chief executive. According to investigators millions of dollars were pilfered from the bus company through dubious purchases of spare parts. Following the arrest, Mutharika fired Mvula. He was the first member of Muluzi's inner circle to be arrested under the government of President Mutharika.

¶14. (SBU) Atupele Muluzi, MP, son of former President Bakili Muluzi. Bright and articulate, Muluzi is a leader of the younger MPs in the UDF, though he lacks the respect of many older UDF die-hards. After leaving college in the UK, where he studied law, Atupele returned to Malawi and won a parliamentary seat in 2004. He is also involved in the running of his father's numerous businesses. Despite this fact, he has come across as independent, rational, and reform-oriented in his dealings with mission staff. As Chair of the Parliamentary Legal Affairs Committee he pushed for the passage of the Anti Money Laundering bill during the last meeting of Parliament.

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